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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 003152

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF AND AF/E , AND INR/AA
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/24/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [ER](#)

SUBJECT: ERITREA: ERITREAN OPPOSITION FIGURE ON FAILED
ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT

REF: A. ASMARA 821

[1](#)B. ASMARA 838

Classified By: Political/Economic Chief Michael Gonzales For Reason 1.4
(b).

[1](#)1. (S//NF) SUMMARY. On October 24 prominent Eritrean opposition figure Adhanom K. Gebremariam told PolOff that senior Eritrean government (GSE) military officials were behind the October 13 assassination attempt against the Deputy Eritrean Security Chief Simon Ghebredenghil, and that the attempt has generated a severe rift within Eritrea's ruling elite. He claimed the security official was shot to prevent him from investigating the death of an Eritrean businessman, Fikre, who was tied to western zone commander General Teklay. Fikre's death in prison, Adhanom explained, was facilitated by rival businessmen linked to a another zone commander, General Wuchu. Adhanom asserted the affair pitted two senior military officials against a third exposing disunity and widespread corruption within the government when Eritrea was facing severe challenges at home and abroad. Information PolOff collected concerning Adhanom's opposition activities will be sent Septel. END SUMMARY.

BUSINESS RIVALRY BEHIND ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT

[1](#)2. (S//NF) Adhanom, a senior GSE official until 2000 and now a respected opposition leader who claimed he received the information from Eritrean officials in Asmara, said that Deputy Security Chief Simon Ghebredenghil was shot to prevent him from implicating General Gerezgheir "Wuchu" Andemariam and other senior officials in the recent death of a wealthy Eritrean businessman named Fikre.

[1](#)3. (S//NF) Adhanom then explained that President Isaias ensures the loyalty of his zone commanders by allowing them to make money through control of business affairs and duty free access to commodities for local resale in each of their respective territorial zones. (NOTE: Eritrea is divided into five territorial zones, each led by a military General who reports directly to Isaias.) He also noted that there was fierce competition between the Eritrean businessmen who vied for contracts from the commanders. It was this competition

that led to the death of Fikre. Fikre had recently obtained lucrative contracts for the development of the Sawa training camp from General Teklay Habteselasse, commander of the western zone. Adhanom asserted that rival business interests, associated with General Wuchu, arranged for Fikre's arrest on corruption charges leading to his death by torture in prison.

¶4. (S//NF) Upon Fikre's death, General Teklay and a third zone commander, General Filipos Woldeyohannes, went to President Isaias and demanded an investigation into the incident. Isaias then appointed Simon to lead the inquiry, but the businessmen who were behind Fikre's death, fearing exposure, attempted to kill the security official in the October 13 attack.

INCIDENT SHAKES ISAIAS AND REGIME

¶5. (S//NF) Adhanom underscored that the affair pitted two zone commanders against a third, and thus it had shaken both President Isaias and the People's Front for Democracy and Justice party because it exposed the rampant corruption and disunity at the senior level of the Eritrean government at a time when Eritrea was in a most difficult situation domestically and with mounting tensions along its southern border. He speculated that General Wuchu would be easily replaced, but that the incident would reverberate within the government for some time to come.

COMMENT

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¶6. (S//NF) While Post cannot confirm the validity of Andhanom's explanation of events in the assassination attempt, he does appear to maintain regular contact with current senior Eritrean officials as a former member, including one-time Attorney General, of that government. Information collected by PolOff concerning the Eritrean opposition and other issues will be sent Septel. END COMMENT.
YAMAMOTO